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The counsel of Gamaliel considered,

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S E R M O N,

Preached before

The Society in SCOTLAND for propagating Christian Knowledge,

At their Anniversary Meeting,

In the HIGH CHURCH of EDINBURGH,

On *Monday, January 4. 1762.*

By ROBERT DICK, D.D.

Minister of the Trinity-college church of Edinburgh,

[Published at their desire.]

EDINBURGH:

Printed by W. SANDS, A. MURRAY, and J. COCHRAN.

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A S E R M O N.

ACTS V. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39.

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space, And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be some body, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

THIS wise counsel was occasioned by a celebrated event. Jesus of Nazareth, who had assumed the character of the Jewish Messiah, published a new doctrine, and gained several profelytes; after a public trial, had been condemned

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to death, as an impostor, and crucified at Jerusalem, in the sight of the whole nation. The ignominious death of their leader, gave reason to expect the dispersion of his adherents, and the extinction of his doctrine. But these hopes were disappointed. The followers of Jesus, although they were persons of the lowest rank, and had discovered strong marks of fear, during his trial and execution, were animated with amazing courage after his death. They boldly charged the Jewish magistrates with the blood of the Messiah, declared him to be raised from the dead by the power of God, and advanced to a state of high authority and glory; wherein he would dispense the most important blessings to all his disciples. They claimed the character of witnesses chosen for attesting his history, and that of persons commissioned to teach his doctrine; producing, for their vouchers, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost which resided with them. These bold pretensions alarmed the rulers of the nation, and engaged them in anxious deliberation about the means of securing the public

public tranquillity, and preventing the growth of this infant sect. To keep them at a distance from harsh measures, is the object of an experienced counsellor, in the words of the text; who demonstrates, by recent examples, drawn from their own history, and by maxims of acknowledged wisdom, that, in the present case, violent counsels would prove either needless or ineffectual: "I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it." If this new system be the effect of fraud or delusion, it must soon come to nought, as it wants those advantages which are essential to the success of an imposture: but if it spring from a higher origin, equally vain and impious will be all opposition, to a religion supported by the power of God.

Such were the reflections of wise men, when the Christian religion first appeared; and when the competition was between power, policy, and learning, on the one side, and a few men of low rank, and

mean education, on the other; who, notwithstanding these disadvantages, undertook to spread their doctrine over the whole earth. If any of us had been present in that famous council, could we have reasonably embraced a different opinion, and conceived how an imposture, in such hands, and under such circumstances, should spread for many ages, and at last get possession of the whole civilized world? After the experience of seventeen hundred years, when the gospel hath been adorned with so many triumphs, shall we form a contrary judgment, and believe, that still “this counsel
 “or this work, is of men, and will come
 “to nought?” May we not entertain a more delightful persuasion, that this religion, which hath stood such severe trials, and overthrown so many enemies, was not introduced without a divine interposition, nor afterwards supported without a favourable providence, and shall, from the same causes, continue throughout all ages? For confirming these agreeable hopes, let us observe,

I. Some

1. Some circumstances which distinguish this religion in its rise and early progress, from all others that have yet appeared : And then consider,

2. How far the present situation of the world, and the visible dispositions of Providence, seem to promise the propagation and continuance of it.

This argument, ever comfortable to sincere Christians, becometh peculiarly seasonable, when their fears have been alarmed by the apostasy of some persons from the profession of the gospel, and by the profligacy, the lukewarmness and indifference of too many who continue in it. Under such discouraging circumstances, it becometh us, on proper occasions, to review the foundations of our religion, and the reasons why we believe this blessed institution shall flourish to the most remote generations.

I. OUR Saviour entered upon his grand undertaking, as a person commissioned from Heaven ; who, for his success, relied only upon the power of God. He possessed none
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of that authority which is derived from rank, power, or learning; which, in special conjunctures, hath misled the credulity of men; but was born of mean parents, enjoyed no public character, and had not received a learned education.

The history of the period in which Jesus appeared, is inconsistent with any design of changing the public religion, or with a concert among men of wisdom and authority for introducing a salutary deception among the people. The Jews and the Romans, united their zeal against the gospel; which, in different views, was odious to each of them: “Kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed *.” But vain was all opposition to the decrees of Heaven. Every obstacle vanished before the Almighty: “The valleys were exalted, the mountains and hills were made low; the crooked was made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord was revealed †.” In this respect, Christians, the author of our

* Psal. ii. 2.

† Is. xl. 4, 5.

religion distinguisheth himself from those famous lawgivers, who, with the indulgence of their discerning countrymen, have bestowed a divine origin upon human constitutions, to render these more venerable in the eyes of the people. Jesus was no lawgiver but in the house of God; and instead of aid or connivance, met with the most violent and concerted opposition, from the public power and wisdom of his country.

As we cannot ascribe the introduction of our religion to a measure of policy, as little can we refer it to the ordinary arts of imposture. These generally make application to the interest, the ambition, or other worldly passions of a few men; who being once heartily engaged, find little difficulty in spreading their opinions. A man of courage and intrigue, who, in an unsettled period, forms a plausible scheme of seizing the sovereignty of his country, will never want accomplices ready to favour any cheat that can facilitate his enterprise. In this way, chiefly, did the great prophet of the east, rise to his spiritual and worldly empire.

pire. The usurpation was the ultimate object of the imposture; and the prospect of power to be communicated with his favourites, was a motive that naturally allured profelytes, and laid the foundation of a thriving party. When to this leading circumstance we add the rude state of the people amongst whom this deceit was first broached, the dextrous use made of the Jewish and Christian revelations, and the artful compliances with the prevailing passions of that country, it is easy to conceive the success of a prophet, who was soon to become a considerable prince, and possess the means of rewarding his disciples. The spiritual and secular authority being once lodged in the same hands, is it to be wondered, that a state rising to power by favourable conjunctures, and the common arts of policy, should extend her dominion and religion by the same means? But what resemblance do you find here to the gospel of Christ? Doth the character of Jesus, or of the religion which he published, bring to your thoughts the wisdom of this world? Did he promise to his followers, power, wealth,

wealth, or pleasure? Did he use any condescension to the passions of men, and court their favour, by an indulgence to their vices? Did he claim for himself any temporal pre-eminence, or accommodate his doctrines to such a design? “ If any man will come
 “ after me, let him deny himself, and take
 “ up his cross, and follow me*.” “ The
 “ foxes have holes, and the birds of the air
 “ have nests; but the Son of man hath not
 “ where to lay his head †.” “ The prin-
 “ ces of the Gentiles exercise dominion o-
 “ ver them, and they that are great, exer-
 “ cise authority upon them. But it shall
 “ not be so among you: but whosoever
 “ will be great among you, let him be your
 “ minister: and whosoever will be chief
 “ among you, let him be your servant.
 “ Even as the Son of man came not to be
 “ ministered unto, but to minister, and to
 “ give his life a ransom for many ‡.”
 “ My kingdom is not of this world ||.” Is
 this the language of an impostor, or of a

* Matth. xvi. 24.

† Matth. viii. 20.

‡ Matth. xx. 25. 26. 27. 28.

|| John xviii. 36.

prophet of God? Did Mahomet address his countrymen in such a strain? Was not his "kingdom of this world," and did not his "servants fight" for him? How unlike to him, who "for this cause came into the world, that he might bear witness to the truth*;" and be the conductor of men to eternal happiness; nor ever polluted this divine ambition with the least tincture of worldly project?

If the first success of the gospel was neither owing to the devices of political wisdom, nor to the arts of imposture working upon worldly passions, have we any other resource in the folly, credulity, or enthusiasm of our species, which will explain this appearance, without calling in the power of God? Here we meet with the triumphs of infidelity, and are presented with a pompous display of those false religions which have prevailed in the world. These, tho' the offspring of imposture or enthusiasm, yet, by specious pretensions to a divine original, have, in their turns, insulted human reason, and at this moment fill the greatest

* John xviii. 37.

part of the earth : nor is there any other security against such delusions, if we believe our adversaries, than a fixed resolution to reject all claims to divine inspiration. If supernatural works are produced in support of them, this pretended proof is the surest mark of fraud, and should determine every wise man to disregard both miracles and doctrine, without further inquiry. Are these the reflections " of truth and soberness," or of a prejudiced mind ? Because false revelations have been pretended, are we sure that God hath never communicated, in a supernatural way, his will to mankind ? Because counterfeit and forged miracles have been obtruded upon the world, in order to support the avarice and ambition of particular persons or societies, shall we conclude, that God never, in any instance, interrupted the course of nature, or stamped the seals of his power upon the manifestations of his pleasure to men ? Is human nature so happily situated in this world, and so secure with regard to its future condition, as to need no other guidance or consolation, than what may be derived from the light of

nature? Is it impossible, that the gracious Father of the world should make any addition to the dictates of nature, and give a more full discovery of his designs, in answer to the earnest wishes and hopes of his much-favoured creatures? Do the different religions that fill the world, stand so much upon a level, as to merit no separate consideration? Do any systems of religion, the Jewish and Christian being excepted, pretend to be founded in miracles, recorded by those who were eye-witnesses of those miracles, or who lived at the time when those miracles were wrought? Amongst all the acknowledged delusions which have overspread the world, did any one ever take rise from a course of pretended miracles? Do not Jesus and the prophets, in whom Christians believe, and they alone, make appeals to miracles for the vouching of their commission from God? We have often heard of the wonderful effects of enthusiasm; that persons under this influence have embraced the wildest opinions, adhered to them with obstinacy, and fallen martyrs to absurdity and delusion. The fact

fact is undeniable. What is the reason of it? In matters of opinion, men frequently err, and retain their false judgments, with the same firmness as they do the truth. But is this found to be the case in matters of fact? Was it ever known, that twelve persons of mean education, and plain character, formed a consistent narrative of numerous facts which never existed, persisted in it to the last, without confession or detection, and sealed the attestation with their blood? If Jesus had wrought no miracles, but rested the credit of his mission upon the prophecies of the Old Testament, or upon inward illuminations and visions, he had wanted one character expected in the Messiah; and the Jews, according to his own declaration, had been excusable in their unbelief. Opinions derived from interpretation and deduction, leave room for mistake; and all pretences to visions, or divine illumination, open a wide field for fraud and delusion: but our Saviour recurred to a test which no impostor ever submitted to with impunity: "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

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“ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works *.” In vain are objected the Heathen and the Popish miracles, which bear no resemblance to those of Jesus and his apostles, nor in any degree weaken the foundations of our religion. The superstitions of the Heathen never boasted of this foundation, nor do their miracles, whether real or fictitious, stand connected with any religious system. Those supposed to have happened in Roman-Catholic countries, were performed, not as proofs of a new religion, but of one already established ; not before unbelievers, but devotees ; not in support of a scheme of piety and severe morals, interfering in many respects with the secular interests of those by whom they were performed, but in manifest subordination to the wealth and power of the Romish establishment, and in direct contradiction to that sacred record which all Christians acknowledge to be the standard of their common faith. To which we must add, that the fraud, and the method of ma-

* John x. 25. 37. 38.

naging it, hath, in many instances, been detected. With what candour, then, is our religion likened to those delusions which have amused the credulity of men? Do we see in Jesus a legislator, imposing upon his fellow-citizens, from motives of private ambition, or public utility? or a deceiver, aiming plainly at wealth and power, and engaging associates to promote a fraud that will afford an ample recompence? or an enthusiast, who from false interpretations of scripture, inconclusive reasonings, inward illuminations and visions, being first deceived himself, afterwards deceiveth others? The Christian revelation, according to the history of it, stands upon no foundation of this sort; but upon one peculiar to itself, to which no religion on earth ever laid claim, if we except that which is professed by the Jewish nation. Acknowledge this foundation, the rise and progress of our religion is plain, and accounted for: the cause bears a proportion to the effect. Withdraw it, the whole becometh dark and inexplicable. In short, without an interposition of the divine arm, the world had never beheld the triumphant

triumphant progress of the gospel over so many nations, while it wanted those favourable circumstances which alone can give success to an imposture. “ If it had been “ of men,” long ago “ would it have come “ to nought ;” but “ because it was of God, “ it could not be overthrown ;” and we trust, for the same reason, never will be overthrown. Which leads me to consider,

II. How far the present situation of the world, and the visible dispositions of Providence, seem to promise the propagation and continuance of it.

When our religion was first published, under the disadvantages that attended it, men might naturally conclude, that nothing but the blessing of God, and the powerful operation of his providence, could procure for it an establishment in the world. But now that it hath spread so far, escaped so many dangers, foiled such powerful enemies, and subjected the greatest empires to its influence, the extinction of it would be as surprising, as were its introduction and first progress. Irregular conduct, or an unhappy

happy turn of thought, may render this institution distasteful to individuals; but its public authority is likely to continue and spread, without an unfavourable interposition of the Almighty, which no Christian apprehendeth, and I suppose no unbeliever will rely upon. Some remarkable circumstances, in the present situation of the world, give reasonable hopes that our religion will soon visit distant nations, and be settled among them upon a more secure foundation than in any former period. As this event would furnish an additional argument of divine favour towards Christianity, so would it likewise give a natural security for its duration, notwithstanding any local or temporary decline from particular causes. The present course of empire and commerce, opens a delightful prospect to every serious observer. As it taketh rise from nations enlightened by true religion and valuable science, and spreadeth into Heathen and Mahometan countries, these remote regions are inspired with veneration for an institution, which is adopted by men superior to themselves, and is found in com-

pany with so many improvements. Persons who in some views are indifferent about our religion, become interested in its propagation, and will not neglect what they know to be the most sacred bond of union among men, and conducive to the success of their secular projects. When, therefore, we behold the whole Christian world convinced, as by inspiration, that an extensive commerce with distant nations, is the only sure fountain of wealth and dominion, and straining all their faculties to acquire this treasure, which cannot be done effectually without spreading the gospel; do we not see the all-wise God taking into his own service the interest and the ambition of men, the most universal, and the most powerful principles of human action, and rendering them the instruments of his own glory? How weak are the devices of men; and how infallible the counsels of God! How inexhaustible are the resources of the Most High, for accomplishing his gracious purposes, while he employeth not only the virtues and the talents of his servants, but the vices and the worldly views
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of men which have long dishonoured religion where it hath been planted, to diffuse it unto unknown regions, and make the name of the Redeemer glorious over the whole earth ! “ O the depth of the riches
 “ of the wisdom and knowledge of God !
 “ how unfearchable are his judgments, and
 “ his ways past finding out * !”

While the gospel is gradually enlightening the dark places of the earth, it would be melancholy to see those nations which have long enjoyed its salutary influence, become insensible to their happiness. From this quarter, however, the justest fears of Christians are thought to arise. Men are apt to grow weary of the greatest blessings, and from the love of novelty, the affectation of distinction, and sometimes from vicious dispositions, to undervalue the religion of their fathers ; to cherish doubts about the truth of it ; and at last, either to disbelieve, or to become perfectly indifferent whether it be true or false. When we suppose the profligate, the indifferent, and the unbelieving, to be all combined against our holy

* Rom. xi. 33.

faith, and to be possessed of such advantages as add weight to their opinions and example, the situation of the Christian church appears to be almost desperate: but a more mature consideration of these appearances will diminish our fears, and satisfy us, that although such characters themselves be destitute of religious comforts, their influence cannot prove fatal to a public profession, nor endanger any establishment that supporteth it. Be pleased to observe them more particularly.

Men openly vicious and immoral, can derive no credit upon any scheme of opinions or practices, but disgrace every standard under which they are ranged. They are seldom consulted in modelling a church, or in framing institutions of civil government. Their character disqualifieth them for such employment: and should they, by the unsearchable order of Providence, be placed at the head of human affairs, as hath often been the case, their designs cannot be carried into execution, without the assistance of others who are probably of a different disposition, and will disappoint

disappoint their impious counsels. Besides, the passions of a vicious man are seldom gratified by changing the religion of his country. Particular indulgences are his only object, which he generally obtains by less invidious means. Religion is beheld with veneration, even by the wicked, who are often willing to efface their crimes, by the most zealous encouragement of public piety; and sacred institutions are ever the last thing attacked by the most wanton and cruel tyranny. In the revolutions of this fluctuating world, religious systems have generally ascended from the subjects to the sovereign; and in those few cases where the throne may be thought rather to have given than received a religion, it was never filled by a profligate prince*. Such characters,

* Henry VIII. of England is rather an apparent than a real exception from this observation. Although we should suppose this prince to deserve the character here mentioned, which is a questionable point; yet could he not be deemed to have changed the public religion. His passions carried him to abolish the Papal jurisdiction in England, and to seize a considerable part of the ecclesiastical revenues; but Henry's reformation proceeded no farther. He continued zealously attached

ters, either continue in their old profession, or being equally indisposed to all kinds of religion, are distinguished only by their impiety.

The indifferent are enemies from whom we have still less to fear. They are lost indeed to the Christian church ; but they introduce no other system, and leave the established faith in full security.

The opposition of unbelievers, which may seem the most alarming, is less to be dreaded than is commonly thought. Having no other religion to put in competition with Christianity, their zeal becometh ineffectual, through the want of a determinate object. They will never revive the superstitions of the Heathen. As little regard have they for the religion of Mahomet. Claiming itself a divine original, and allow-

ed to the ancient doctrines and worship ; and persecuted, with his usual violence, every deviation from them, during his whole reign. England, at this period, was not more reformed from the errors of the church of Rome, than France is at present. Besides, it is not intended, in this part of the argument, to distinguish between the different forms under which the same religion appears, but between religious systems that are raised upon distinct and separate foundations.

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ing the same honour to Christianity, it can find no admirers among those who reject all pretences to inspiration. Shall our religion then come to an end, without any other substituted in its room? or shall the religion of nature be at last declared sufficient for the direction and the comfort of human life; and all additions, either to the matters it contains, or to the evidence upon which it is founded, be deemed superfluous? This supposition can proceed from those only who admit into their system the belief of a particular Providence, and of a future state of retribution; about which interesting points, those who reject the gospel are not yet agreed. Even after this supposition, may we not be allowed to ask, in what age or country this religion ever prevailed, without the aid of positive institutions? Should these be added to natural religion, by the most respectable authority upon earth, in order to unite men in a public profession; how unequal would be the competition, between a creature of human policy, which is but of yesterday, and a plan of institutions, venerable from their antiquity, and consecrated

crated by the belief of a divine original? But with what propriety can we state an opposition between the religion of nature and the gospel of Christ? Is not every article of the former incorporated into the latter? and what is there, in the whole compass of Christianity thus completed, that can be unacceptable to the sons of men? Can it displease them to see the dictates of nature confirmed by the testimony of God himself? the doctrines she taught concerning God and Providence, and all the joyful hopes she ever gave her children, improved and strengthened? Can men take exception at that effusion of divine light, and those gracious offers of mercy, which so well suit the necessities of a dark and sinful state? Doth the ignorant object against instruction? the criminal against a pardon? the slave of sin against the liberty of the sons of God? he who is sinking under the natural fears of death, against the hopes of a resurrection to eternal life? "How can these things be?" The mysteries of our religion, which could not have been discovered without a divine revelation, and the miraculous works upon
which

which it is built, may raise disgust and suspicions in a few minds, which meditate with too little modesty upon the ways of God; but to the far greater part of Christians, even these will appear the ornament and glory of our faith, and prove a principal source of their warmest attachment. Take natural religion, separated from the Christian, without the peculiar institutions, doctrines, and promises of the gospel; and take that same natural religion, supported by the stupendous miracles, adorned with the venerable rites, and animated with the glorious prospects of the gospel; offer each of them to mankind, the one as discovered by the force of human sagacity, and the other as revealed by God himself; ask which system they would chuse for the measure of their conduct, and the foundation of their hopes? We need not hesitate about the answer. The experiment hath been made, and we know the issue: "The foolishness of God proved wiser than men; and the weakness of God stronger than men *."

* 1 Cor. i. 25.

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While one class of unbelievers are unable, another, more valuable, we must suppose unwilling to give any obstruction to the gospel of Christ. If you place in this number any who embrace the great articles of natural religion, and believe in a God, a providence, and a future state of retribution; who love mankind, venerate the institutions of their country, and abhor every innovation inconsistent with the public happiness; from such characters our holy faith will be in little danger. They will never set themselves to change the religion of their country, till a conviction of its pernicious tendency, and its loss of credit among the people, have paved the way for this attempt. Of such a conjuncture Christians need not be afraid. The gospel hath hitherto proved victorious over every rival, when the conflict was maintained upon equal terms; nor can an instance be produced, of any nation where this religion, once planted, was afterwards extirpated without the force of arms. In every country where Christianity is established, the body of the people, however negligent of its laws, re-
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tain their belief of its divine original, and make the promises contained in it the foundation of their hopes. Till the case be altered, a few exceptions furnish no ground of anxiety. There is no cause to be alarmed by a few speculative men; who, fond of novelty, and eager to distinguish themselves from the herd of mankind, disseminate notions above the comprehension, or repugnant to the common sense of their fellows, without discretion, and generally without success. Whatever talents or virtues such characters may possess, they are not likely to overthrow the religion of their country.

If, Christians, we profess a religion so consonant to reason, and to the universal anticipations of human nature, that no system which hath yet appeared, could support a competition with it upon equal terms; if we entertain no fears from the power of a conqueror, nor from the success of any new imposture; if natural religion is become a part of the Christian, every article of the former being incorporated into the latter; if neither the profligate, the indifferent, nor even unbelievers, who pre-

serve a regard for the happiness of society, can excite any just apprehensions that the public profession and belief of our religion is coming to an end : arguing from second causes, of which only we have treated under this head, we would conclude it to be the will of God, and the determination of his providence, that this religion shall not come to nought ; and therefore, according to the principle of Gamaliel, that “ this counsel and work is not of men.” Can the mind of a Christian be more agreeably employed, than in contemplating the perpetuity of that spiritual kingdom which God hath erected among mankind, for displaying his wisdom and goodness, recovering and improving his degenerate creatures, and leading them to endless happiness ? Can a Christian reflect, without the highest joy, that the holy faith which hath descended to him from his ancestors, which hath so often refreshed him with consolations, and elevated him with the most glorious hopes, shall spread its influence still wider, and extend its blessings to the most remote ages ? that the church of God, the

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depository of his laws and promises, which hath stood unmoved under many a storm, shall still, notwithstanding "the winds that blow, and the rains that descend," continue fixed "like mount Zion, that cannot be moved?"

The promise of God is, without question, the most solid foundation for the faith of a Christian. Whoever recalls to his thoughts the declaration of our Saviour, "That his church is built upon a rock; and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*," and that "he will be with his servants unto the end of the world †," while they are employed in supporting and propagating his religion, can entertain no doubt that these declarations will be accomplished, either by the miraculous interposition of God, or by the ordinary course of his providence. It is, however, an additional comfort when a Christian observeth the particular steps and arrangements of providence, by which God accomplisheth his gracious purposes. By these medita-

* Math. xvi. 16.

† Math. xxviii. 20.

tions our faith is strengthened, and we acquire the joyful assurance, that while we are engaged in spreading our holy religion, we are supported by the divine providence, and are fellow-workers with God. To this honourable character the society for propagating Christian knowledge are justly intitled. This worthy body have chosen for the object of their association, the noble design of diffusing, among their fellow-creatures, the knowledge of God, and his son Jesus Christ. Distant nations have felt the benefit of their pious zeal, while the uncivilized parts of their own country have justly engaged their more particular attention.

The highlands and islands of Scotland have long been distinguished from the other parts of Great Britain, by an imperfect knowledge of religion, and a slender acquaintance with the arts of life. The difference of manners and language, with an inaccessible situation, had formed an unfortunate partition between the inhabitants of those countries, and their more improved fellow-citizens, which excluded them from
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those advantages that would naturally have accompanied a freer communication. When the southern provinces were recovered from the errors of Popery, far advanced in useful arts, and living under the influence of mild and equitable laws, a great part of the highlanders continued still under the miseries of superstition, and barbarous manners, cut off from the benefits of true religion, and a free government. The ministrations of their worthy pastors, with the assistance of their more enlightened countrymen, although they diminished, were unable to cure those evils; nor had any other means of reformation occurred to the public, when the society already mentioned engaged in this great work. The success which hath accompanied their labours, justifieth the wisdom of the design, and the prudent methods employed in the execution of it. Making application to that early age which is freest from prejudice, and most susceptible of good impressions, they have been able to prevent those errors and bad habits, which could not, by human means, have been removed in more advanced

advanced years. By joining to religious instruction, some branches of secular education, they have rendered their plan more compleat, and alleviated those prejudices which would have obstructed a reformation purely religious. Even Roman-Catholic parents are reconciled to the design, and with eagerness send their children to schools where they see a foundation laid for their future prosperity in the world. I am authorised to inform this assembly, that 140 schools are, at this present time, maintained by the society; and that, according to the latest reports concerning the state of them, the number of scholars, of both sexes, amounteth to 6693, several of whom, besides being instructed in reading and writing, arithmetic, and church music, are also taught some kinds of manufacture suited to their circumstances*. Having been lately employed in a public

* His Majesty makes an annual donation of L. 1000, to be employed by the general assembly of the church of Scotland, for the reformation of the highlands and islands, and places where Popery and ignorance prevail. The assembly.

public service, I had an opportunity of visiting many of those schools which are settled in the most remote and uncultivated parts of our country; and from my own personal observation, coincident entirely with a public testimony of one of my Reverend colleagues from this place, can assure the society, that their pious labours are not lost; and that they are employing the most effectual method of curing religious errors and political prejudices, of banishing a spirit of idleness and rapine, of adding useful citizens to the commonwealth, and valuable members to the church of God. Nay, there is ground to believe, that the good seed sown in these nurseries of piety and virtue, hath already produced glorious fruits; and that some of those gallant men

1760 appointed some ministers, of which the author of this sermon was one, to visit those countries which are the object of the Royal bounty. The visitors, at the request of the society for propagating Christian knowledge, inquired into the state of the society's schools; and from the ability of the masters, the proficiency of the scholars, and the general disposition of the inhabitants to have their children well educated, were thoroughly convinced, that the most happy effects might be expected from this well-judged charity.

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who

who have appeared with so much renown in the cause of their country, received from this charity their first qualification for this honourable service.

The society need no incitement to persist in their "labours of love." A consciousness that their endeavours have been successful, is at present a sufficient and a glorious reward; and they know, that they shall reap still more "abundantly, if they faint not." It would be injurious to suppose, that so noble an undertaking should languish through want of encouragement. In an age which abounds in humanity towards every species of misery, and in public spirit to forward every worthy plan, shall hearts or hands be wanting, to rescue men from the vassallage of sin and Satan, and add new subjects to the immortal empire of God, and of his son Jesus Christ? The great designs of the Almighty must prove successful: "The floods may lift up their voice, but the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters *." The governor of the world can never want

* Psal. xciii. 4.

instruments to accomplish his own counsels. The little projects of men may succeed or miscarry ; the empires of this world may rise and fall in succession ; but amidst all the vicissitudes of this lower world, every Christian rests assured, that “ the kingdoms of “ the earth shall become the kingdoms of “ God, and of his Christ.” May this blessed period arrive ; may “ the name of God “ be hallowed ; may his kingdom come ; “ and his will be done on earth, as it is “ done in heaven.” *Amen.*

Names

Names of the persons appointed to receive BENEFACCTIONS in *London* and *Edinburgh*, for the use of this SOCIETY.

In *London*, Mess. *Roffey* and company, Merchants.

In *Edinburgh*, Mr *John Davidson*, Writer to the Signet.

FORM of a LEGACY.

Item. I give and bequeath the sum of to the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, to be applied [*either to the purposes of the first or second charters, as the donor pleases.*]

Committee of DIRECTORS for the year 1762.

James Smollet of *Bonhill*, Esq; his Majesty's Sheriff-depute for the shire of *Dumbar-ton*, and one of the Commissaries of *Edinburgh*, Preses.

The Right Honourable the Earl of *Fife*.

Mr

Mr *John Erskine* one of the Ministers of *Edinburgh*.

Mr *John Russel*, Clerk to the Signet.

Mr *Arch. Wallace*, Merchant in *Edinburgh*.

Mr *John Paton*, Bookseller there.

Dr *Matthew Stewart*, Professor of Mathematics in the college of *Edinburgh*.

Mr *James Robertson*, Professor of Oriental Languages in the said college.

Mr *Albert Munro* of *Coull*.

Mr *James Dundas* of *Philpstown*, Advocate.

Mr *William Hogg*, Merchant in *Edinburgh*.

Mr *William Miller*, Bookseller there.

Mr *Robert Walker*, Surgeon there.

Mr *James Balfour* of *Pilrig*, Advocate.

Mr *Robert Russel*, Merchant in *Edinburgh*.

The Most Honourable the Marquis of *Lothian* is President of the General Court.

The Right Honourable *William Grant* of *Prestongrange*, one of the Senators of the College of Justice, Secretary.

George Drummond, Esq; Comptroller.

Robert Chalmers, Accountant.

John Davidson, Writer to the Signet, Treasurer.

William Ross, Writer in *Edinburgh*, Clerk.

John Lothian, Bookholder.

James Brown, Bookseller.

Alexander Coutts, Officer.

Mr. John Erskine one of the Ministers of Edinburgh.
Mr. John Ruff, Clerk to the Signet.
Mr. Arch. Watson, Merchant in Edinburgh.
Mr. John Paton, Bookbinder there.
Dr. Matthew Stewart, Professor of Mathematics in the college of Edinburgh.
Mr. James Robertson, Professor of Oriental Languages in the said college.
Mr. Robert Murray, Advocate.
Mr. James Dunlop of Edinburgh, Advocate.
Mr. William Hogg, Merchant in Edinburgh.
Mr. William Miller, Bookbinder there.
Mr. Robert Walker, Surgeon there.
Mr. James Baillie of Fyvie, Advocate.
Mr. Robert Ruff, Merchant in Edinburgh.
The Most Honourable the Marquis of Argyll is President of the General Court.
The Right Honourable William Grant of Fyvie, one of the Senators of the College of Justice, Secretary.
George Drummond, Esq. Comptroller.
Robert Graham, Accountant.
John Davidson, Writer to the Signet, Treasurer.
William Ruff, Writer in Edinburgh, Clerk.
James Brown, Bookbinder.
James Brown, Bookbinder.
Alexander Grant, Officer.